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Important Aspects of Polygraph Examinations of Islamic Faith People

Tamerlan Stanislavovich Batyrov

Instructor of Autonomous Non-profit Organization for Additional Professional
Education "Center for Applied Psychophysiology" (National School of Lie Detection), Russian Federation, Moscow
french2007@yandex.ru

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Abstract

In this article the author gives recommendations for running polygraph examinations of Islamic faith representatives during the Muslim fasting period of Ramadan based on his own practical experience and interactions with Muslim psychologists, and also analyzes examples of incorrect formulations of relevant questions on the subject of Islamic terrorism / extremism in the course of screening examinations.

Polygraph examinations during the Month of Ramadan

Ramadan fasting is the abstinence from food, drinking and sexual intercourse from dawn till sunset, immediately after which all of the above become permitted. The first day of fasting in 2020 was on April 24th, the last on May 23rd. So, each day of fasting consists of two periods: abstinence from dawn till sunset (from about 3:40 to 22:50) and permissibility from sunset till dawn (from 22:50 to 3:40) [<https://umma.ru/o-poste-v-ramadan-dlya-novichkov>].

Restrictions of sleep and diet during Ramadan entails a number of psychophysiological consequences among which we can observe a decrease in attention concentration, general weakness, drowsiness, memory impairment, irritability, certain troubles with circulatory system, etc. As a result, polygraph examinations of people observing the Ramadan fast in the morning and afternoon time, which is normally considered to be optimal, after a poorly conducted pre-test interview and with a lack of proper control on the part of a polygraph examiner, can be accompanied by some psychophysiological phenomena that can serve as a basis for a suspicion of examinees' countermeasures, since they do not always volunteer they are fasting. Ideally, the polygraph examiner should clarify this fact before the test procedure begins.

Among the artifacts observed in examinees being in the state of fatigue, which usually worsens many physiological indicators, it is worth highlighting a decrease in the amplitude of electrodermal response, increased motor activity, and periodic forced (deep) breaths (see Fig. 1).

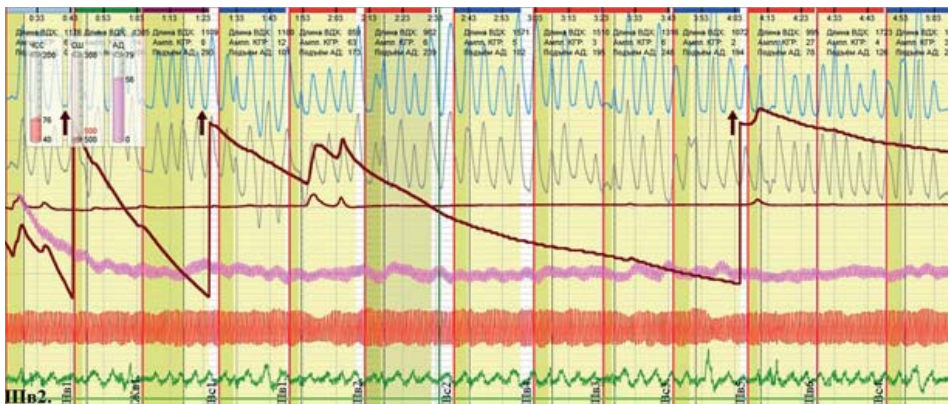


Fig. 1

In connection with everything stated above and in order to increase the quality of polygraph examinations, the author recommends that:

- the duration of testing period should not exceed 2.5 hours. Longer examinations will only lead to an increase in the above-mentioned artifacts, and deep breaths can lead to elevated blood pressure and the occurrence of spontaneous reactions in the electrodermal channel that are not related to the polygraph examiner's questions (Pelenitsyn, Kazakov, Soshnikov; 2018)
- polygraph examinations should be conducted in the first half of the day (if the examinee's occupational work involves intense physical exertion, then testing him in the afternoon, taking into account his fasting, will lessen the possibility of obtaining high-quality polygraph charts), because during the predawn meal (suhoor) they are most likely to consume food that contains a lot of fiber and protein which prevent the onset of hunger [<https://umma.ru/o-poste-v-ramadan-dlya-novichkov>]. If for some reasons it is impossible to conduct the examination in the first half of the day, it is permissible to run it half an hour or an hour after waking up (sleep is not prohibited in the month of Ramadan). It is important the polygraph examiner remember to offer the examinee the opportunity to perform the ritual of morning bathing.

The recommendations given above will not only increase an examinee's trust in the polygraph examiner, but will also improve the quality of the charts recorded during the polygraph examination.

Test Questions on the Subject of Islamic Terrorism / Extremism

The identification of extremists, as well as individuals involved in terrorist organizations, currently poses a complicated problem for personnel departments of various organizations, primarily due to the fact that polygraph examiners lack knowledge of the specifics of different Muslim regions, as well as to the lack of their productive interaction with theologians and experts in the field of Islam. Human Resource (HR) specialists usually develop and apply tests and questionnaires aimed at identifying extremists. This approach solves some tasks relatively fruitfully, but only within those areas (personality analysis, structured interviews) for which it is developed. Since a typical screening polygraph examination usually covers multiple issues and a significant period of an examinee's life, especially if the latter is a follower of Islamic faith, polygraph examiners often face the difficult task of correctly formulating

test questions. So, in their practice polygraph examiners often find themselves in situations where a specialist formulates the questions for a polygraph test based on the questions that are used by HR-managers at structured interviews. Due to the fact that such an approach is not always productive the author suggests considering it in more detail.

In the Russian Federation, usually there are certain ethnic foundations historically formed in some separate Muslim regions, which may differ from those of neighboring Muslim regions, and therefore posing questions with double interpretation related to religious rites is unacceptable. The author, relying on the comments of Muslim psychologists and theologians, offers to critically consider some of the issues, suggested by individual polygraph examiners, the use of which in screening tests can lead to false positive errors:

“Have you publicly justified terrorist acts of banned Islamic organizations?” *Comment: “The word ‘publicly’ may not be very clear to the potential or real terrorist who thinks in Islamic terms. So, this question can be considered ineffective. The tested person may not know the list of banned organizations. Moreover, an act of terrorism can be committed by members of unknown or known, but not banned organizations, renamed organizations, etc. For example, the Hizb ut-Tahrir organization is banned, but it has a few more names that terrorists can act on behalf of.”*

“Have you committed acts aimed at overthrowing the government for religious reasons?”

Comment: The question is too generally related to global ideology. Dry legal formulations of secular laws are far from real word usage in the Muslim environment. A person who has carried out acts of terrorism on a local scale, for example, blew up a store selling alcohol, will answer this question with a sincere “no”. He may believe that he “corrected the authorities’ deviation from the direct path” or “punished sinners”. “The reconstruction of the Caliphate” in a secular country can be conceived by adherents of such ideas without the overthrow of the government, but slowly in stages.

Despite the fact that modern techniques for using the polygraph do not recommend the use of test questions related to opinions, intentions, judgments or wishes of the tested person (the relevant questions, whenever possible, should always relate to specific physical actions and contain the appropriate action verb) (Pelenitsyn, Soshnikov, 2016), polygraph examiners still often raise questions regarding internal social relations, which is also erroneous:

“Do you think that others should adhere to the same faith as you?”

Comment: There is no greater happiness for a Muslim than when his close friends should practice the Islamic religion. At the same time, it is important to emphasize that a Muslim, should keep virtuous attitude towards adherents of a different faith.

“Do you go to the cemetery to visit your relatives’ graves?”

Comment: This question is narrowly targeted; it can be perceived differently given various ethnic features. In some regions, visiting graves and reading prayers is permissible, while radical Islamists strongly condemn such practice. However, there are also people who do not go to the cemetery, explaining their position by saying: “the living – with the living, and the dead – with the dead”, which, certainly, is not a sign of an extremist personality.

Thus, the formulation of the above questions will not contribute to increasing the effectiveness of detecting radicals using the polygraph, but, on the contrary, it can aggravate the relationship between the person being tested and the polygraph examiner as the former may perceive it as a possible violation of his rights. As one of the ways of improving the quality of polygraph examinations the author recommends using a “route map” made in two variants:

Variant 1 is aimed at identifying an extremist personality during a job interview;

Variant 2 is constructed taking into account real circumstances and in accordance with the stated tasks.

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